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SHAKSPEARE'S MANUSCRIPTS,

IN THE POSSESSION

OF

Mr. IRELAND,

EXAMINED,

RESPECTING

THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVIDENCES

OF

THEIR AUTHENTICITY.

By Mr. Webb

By *PHILALETHES.*

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Ac fine dubio in omni re, vincit imitationem VERITAS.

CICERO.

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PREFACE.

THE Author of theſe pages chuſes not to prefix his name to them, for the following reaſons:

Firſt. He is not, in the leaſt, ambitious of literary fame; and writes only in ſupport of what he apprehends to be Truth.

Secondly. He is deſirous that the proofs and arguments ſhould ſtand on their own ground, independent of all other conſiderations; and to have a fair chance, by being left wholly to themſelves; neither recommended by the authority, or depreciated by the name of any perſon and character whatever.

If, in the courſe of public inquiry, it ſhould appear either neceſſary or expedient, he will very willingly come forward with as much openneſs and candour, as he at preſent conceals himſelf with prudence and reſerve.

SHAKSPEARE's

MANUSCRIPTS, &c.

SHAKSPEARE has for theſe laſt forty years been ſo much the object of attention in the literary world, that his works have not only employed various commentators, but every thing relating to him has been ſought after with peculiar avidity and ſedulous curioſity, by the unwearied expoſitor, the inquiſitive antiquary, and the enthuſiaſtic poet.

Later inquiries have not been able to add much information reſpecting this great, and juſtly admired poet, to that which the editors of his works have given in their reſpective publications.

Theſe reſearches proving unſucceſsful, it was concluded, that all the knowledge reſpecting

Shakſpeare, that could be procured, had been obtained. As the relics ſought for could not be found, it was conceived, that what at firſt was concealed by chance, or deſign, had afterwards been deſtroyed by accident, or ignorance; and that, after ſuch indefatigable inquiries, the things ſought, not being found, did not exiſt.

Repeated reſearches being ſo often diſappointed, were at length abandoned: and we ſat contentedly down with the diſcoveries already made; ſatisfying ourſelves with the thought, that, though much might have been loſt, yet much ſtill remained; and that the treaſure in our hands was almoſt a compenſation for the want of that which we never poſſeſſed. In ſuch a ſtate of compoſed acquieſcence, and with no hopes of farther diſcoveries, it muſt be acknowledged, that, on the firſt report of papers, and other things, being brought to light, which were not only aſſerted to belong unto, but to be actually written by Shakſpeare; unuſual curioſity, as well as ſome doubts concerning their authenticity, would be excited; and that, in proportion to the importance of the things diſcovered, and

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the pains before taken to procure even fragments of this illuſtrious poet, and the diſappointment that had hitherto attended the inquiry.

But when we were informed, that not only plays, written with Shakſpeare's own hand, together with original letters to and from the bard; with other curious papers, teſtamentary, and many legal inſtruments; and a number of printed books, in the margins of which he had written notes and obſervations, appeared; when all this rich and multiform treaſure burſt forth at once from obſcurity, and a mine was ſuddenly and unexpectedly diſcovered, containing theſe precious ſtores; it was reaſonable, after the firſt emotions of ſurpriſe had ſubſided, to inquire, not only into the circumſtances that led to, and attended the diſcovery; but alſo into the evidence, and proofs on which their high pretenſions to authenticity were founded. The things diſcovered were of ſuch a nature, and in themſelves ſo curious, various, and important, as to put us upon our guard at the commencement of the inquiry; and to warn us to proceed with the moſt cautious deliberation, to peruſe theſe records with the cloſeſt attention, and moſt

accurate inveſtigation, and to decide alone on the moſt convincing and inconteſtable proofs of their authenticity. And, as the matter was circumſtanced, it was contended, and admitted, that ſuch proofs ſhould be ſo clear, and ſo compulſive, as to ſatisfy the mind, and procure the belief of the moſt ſcrupulous inquirer; and ſilence, though it might not ſatisfy, even ſcepticiſm itſelf.

Under the full impreſſion of theſe ſentiments, I enter upon an inquiry into the papers, and other inſtruments, in the poſſeſſion of Mr. Ireland; moſt of which I have ſeen, and attentively inſpected and peruſed. Before I proceed, I muſt ſolemnly declare, that I am intereſted in this matter no further than I am intereſted for TRUTH. I never had any connexion of any ſort with MR. IRELAND, or even a knowledge of his perſon, before I was introduced to him, by a gentleman of the firſt character and reputation, to inſpect the manuſcripts. Since, indeed, I have viſited him often: and it is but doing him that juſtice to which he is entitled, when I declare, that, from all I have been able to diſcover, and I watched him from the firſt with a curious and ſuſpicious eye,

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no man in his ſituation, could have behaved in a more open, fair, candid, and liberal manner.

In order to form our judgment on this matter, it is evidently neceſſary, that we firſt briefly recite the various particulars of which this vaſt maſs of evidence is compoſed; and then, conſider the *external and internal evidences*, by which their authenticity is ſuppoſed to be incontrovertibly proved.

Many of theſe original papers are now publiſhed by Mr. Ireland: they are as follows:

Fac-ſimiles of Shakſpeare's Autograph.

Do. of Queen Elizabeth's Letter to him.

Do. of Four Miſcellaneous Papers.

Do. of a Letter to Anna Hathereway (whom Shakſpeare afterwards married), incloſing a lock of his hair.

Do. of a Copy of Verſes to the ſame.

Do. of a Copy of Shakſpeare's Letter to the Earl of Southampton.

Do. of the Earl's Anſwer to the ſame.

Do. of Shakſpeare's Profeſſion of his Faith.

Do. of a Letter to Richard Cowley.

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Fac-ſimile of a Pen Drawing, or Sketch of Shakſpeare, by himſelf, with his Arms and Creſt, with two ſignatures of his name.

Do. of the Reverſe, with his Initials, &c. &c.

A Deed of Gift to William Henry Ireland, with fac-ſimiles of his ſignature and ſeal, regularly atteſted. In which he gives to the ſaid Ireland, ſeveral plays, and ten pounds for a ring, in teſtimony of gratitude towards him, for having, at the riſque of his own life, ſaved that of Shakſpeare, when drowning in the river Thames.

Fac-ſimile of tributary Lines to the ſaid Ireland, with the Arms of Ireland, and thoſe of Shakſpeare, linked together by a chain, rudely ſketched by himſelf.

Do. a Pen Sketch of Ireland's houſe in Black-Friars.

Do. another Pen Sketch of the Arms of Shakſpeare and Ireland, and two ſignatures of Shakſpeare.

Do. as it is imagined of Shakſpeare himſelf, in the Character of Baſſanio, a whole length tinted Drawing; on which are his arms, and

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on each ſide, the names of ſeveral of his plays, and the initials of his name.

Fac-ſimile on the reverſe of the above, a Drawing, in the ſame manner as above, of Shylock.

An Agreement with John Lowine, with a fac-ſimile of Shakſpeare's and Lowine's names and ſeals, duly atteſted.

Another Agreement with Henry Condell, with fac-ſimiles and atteſtations as the above.

A Leaſe from Shakſpeare to Michael Fraſer, and Elizabeth his wife, with fac-ſimiles, &c. as above.

A Deed of Truſt from Shakſpeare to John Hemynge, an eminent player at that time, and afterwards the Manager at the Theatre, and who, with Condell, publiſhed Shakſpeare's Works in the year 1623; with fac-ſimiles of his ſignature and ſeal, atteſted by three witneſſes.

The Tragedy of King Lear, with fac-ſimiles of the title, and of the firſt and laſt pages of the play.

Fac-ſimile of the firſt page of a fragment of the Tragedy of Hamlet.

Mr. Ireland acquaints the Public, that, among other many curious papers of Shakſpeare, another and more intereſting hiſtorical play than Vortigern, which will ſoon be exhibited, has been diſcovered in the hand-writing of Shakſpeare; which play, Mr. Ireland promiſes in due time to lay before the Public. He alſo informs us, that he is in poſſeſſion of a great number of books, ſuppoſed, by the autograph, notes, and marginal obſervations, to have formerly belonged to Shakſpeare.

Theſe books made a part of Shakſpeare's library; which, according to a catalogue, evidently written by the ſame hand as wrote the other papers, conſiſted of above eleven hundred volumes.

Now, as upon the face of all theſe various particulars, there appears a manifeſt unity, conformity, and congruity, both from the autograph, and ſimilarity of the writing; we muſt pronounce, *that they are, every, and all of them, ſpurious, and forged; or authentic, and what they are aſſerted to be.*

As to the external evidences of the documents, it is ſaid by many gentlemen, who have attentively

tively inſpected them, and who, from their profeſſions, ſituations, and abilities, muſt be admitted to be competent judges; that the paper on which they are written, both as to its various water-marks, manufacture, and other characteriſtics, bears evident proofs of antiquity.

The legal inſtruments are of ſuch a nature, and their marks ſo authentic; that, in the judgment of ſeveral learned gentlemen of the firſt legal reputation, they would be admitted as evidence in any court of judicature. And when theſe are conſidered in connexion with other papers, referring to circumſtances which are the groundwork of the legal inſtruments themſelves, they reciprocally illuſtrate and confirm each other. This is remarkably the caſe reſpecting the Deed of Gift to IRELAND, on the extraordinary circumſtance of his having ſaved Shakſpeare's life when nearly drowned in the river Thames; and alſo in that very important Deed of Truſt to John Hemynge.

Now, as we have juſt obſerved, theſe papers and legal inſtruments muſt have been forged, or they are authentic. If forged, the forgery muſt have been executed at, or near the time in which

Shakſpeare lived. And it will be difficult to aſſign a reaſon of any ſort for a forgery ſo circumſtanced, and ſo timed. And we muſt obſerve, that it is very extraordinary that forgeries of ſuch magnitude, ſhould never have been applied to any uſe. That they were not, evidently appears from their having lain in obſcurity till their late diſcovery: for, if uſe had been made of them, they would have been diſperſed, and could never have remained entire and in an unbroken maſs. Before the charge of forgery can be ſuppoſed to attach on the other papers, we are to account for, or get rid of theſe legal inſtruments; at leaſt ſo far as theſe inſtruments relate to theſe papers. Indeed, taking them in the whole, they are ſo numerous, and yet conſiſtent; ſo various, and yet ſo minute and particular, and relate to ſo many circumſtances, as to carry on the face of them very ſtrong preſumptions of authenticity. At the ſame time we muſt obſerve, that, ſeparately conſidered, they are in their nature ſo unconnected as to time, circumſtances, and events, as to warrant us in ſaying, that it is by no means probable, if poſſible, for impoſture to have deemed them neceſſary; or if it had, to have accompliſh-

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ed the taſk of ſuch forgery. And legal inſtruments, from their very nature, and the difficulty attending their fabrication, would have been the laſt things that impoſture would have attempted. For though it muſt be readily allowed, that impoſture is very apt to attempt to prove too much, and over-do its part; yet it ſeldom travels far out of its road, having only one point, or object in view. Indeed it is by this limited and confined view, and by attempting to do too much, and produce too many proofs of *one* thing, that impoſture often detects, and defeats itſelf.

CICERO, in his oration for Cluentius, very properly remarks, on the effects of a combination of improbabilities; *hoc uno modo ſæpe multorum improbitate depreſſa veritas emergit*. By parity of reaſon, we may ſay, that by the attempt of bringing too many things together, which on the face of them may bear the appearance of veriſimilitude, error is diſcovered, or impoſture detected. Whereas, in the courſe of truth, where things really exiſt, however diſſonant, unconnected, nay, even oppoſite, and contradictory they may at firſt appear; yet when they are brought into view, and their circumſtances duly weighed, and attentively con-

ſidered, their remote connexions become evident, their relations are diſcovered, their ſeeming inconſiſtencies vaniſh: they unite, coaleſce, and mutually ſupport and illuſtrate each other.

With reſpect to myſelf, I am not only free to confeſs, but bold to aſſert, that, after frequent inſpection, and careful peruſal of theſe papers, and duly weighing their claims to my belief, founded on their own evidence, I am not only fully ſatisfied of their authenticity: but alſo, that I am as fully ſatisfied and believe, that no human wiſdom, cunning, art, or deceit, if they could be united, are equal to the taſk of ſuch an impoſture. On the other ſide, I am forced to yield my aſſent, becauſe not only ſuch evidences of authenticity, as might have been expected, really appear; but a variety of others, equally ſtrong and influential, that could not have been reaſonably expected.

The identity of Shakſpeare's autograph, in the numberleſs ſignatures of his name on theſe papers, as well as in the papers themſelves, manifeſtly appears. There are no more variations than what might have been ſuppoſed to take place from their being written on different papers,

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in different ink, at different times, in various humours, and diſpoſitions of mind, and on various occaſions. The errors and omiſſions that appear, are ſuch as might have been expected from a man of a warm temper, impetuous and prompt genius; which would naturally prevent his compoſing with minute attention; and reviewing, and correcting what was thus rapidly produced with labour and accuracy: but they are ſuch as impoſture would have ſcarcely deemed neceſſary; nay, rather ſuch as it would moſt probably have carefully avoided. Therefore it is not ſtraining the argument to ſay, that theſe very errors and omiſſions (the identity of the other characteriſtics maintained) are no inconſiderable proofs of authenticity. Theſe, with other minutiæ, both of ſubjects and circumſtances, deſerve attention; for, in point of evidence, they are great and important, inverſely as they are (in themſelves ſimply conſidered) little and inſignificant. Theſe, weak as they in themſelves appear,

"*Tho' trifles light as air, are confirmations ſtrong.*"

What man, or ſet of men, who had ſat down with an intention to deceive the world, by palming upon

upon it forgeries of plays in the name of Shakſpeare, could poſſibly have deemed it neceſſary to the ſupport of ſuch a deſign, to have fabricated ſuch writings, and forged ſuch legal inſtruments, as thoſe which now exiſt, and now appear?

Who would have deemed it neceſſary in this caſe, to have forged letters* in the name of Queen Elizabeth? whoſe characteriſtic writing, and autograph, are ſo well known: or if ſuch had been deemed neceſſary, and preſumption had ventured at ſo bold a flight, would the ſame impoſture have deemed it equally ſerviceable to its plan to have fallen from the Queen of England to Ann Hatherway? Or if it had thought to have ſecured itſelf between the two extremes, would it not probably have contented itſelf with leſs minute and circumſtantial evidence, than that of a lock of the Poet's own hair, platted too with the hand of the bard in braid of love, and preſented to the obſcure damſel with a letter and copy of verſes, ſuch as a ſimple ſwain, as he

* To and from the Earl of Southampton, and others, in the name of Queen Elizabeth.

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then was, would have tranſmitted to his fair? O! no.—Nature, and Nature alone, produces documents like theſe. They are marked with the authentic ſeal of her artleſs ſimplicity. Theſe are fine touches, which impoſture can never imitate. It knows full well it is not equal to the taſk; and therefore never attempts it. Nor is it to be conceived, that it ever could have deemed it neceſſary to fortify itſelf with the trivial aid of unimportant receipts, and notes of hand. Much leſs is it to be imagined, that, in order to gain credit for the works of the Poet, it ſhould have been thought neceſſary to make him a ſaint. *Shakſpeare's Profeſſion of Faith*, is a curious relic, conſidered as to its nature and compoſition: and is what ſuch a man may be ſuppoſed to pen, but the laſt that impoſture would venture to forge.

And what ſhall we ſay when we turn from this grave document of ſerious piety, to his Letter to his friend Cowley, in which was incloſed a portrait of himſelf, ſketched by his own hand, in playful humour of trifling wit? Of the ſame ſort is the ſketch of his friend Ireland's houſe; with the minute reſpecting the circumſtance that gave riſe to the attempt: and alſo the tributary

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lines to Ireland, dictated by a grateful heart, for no leſs an obligation than that of being ſaved from drowning in the Thames. Can it be ſuppoſed that any man, in the courſe of impoſition, would ever have riſqued iſſuing ſuch coinage as this, and ventured at fabricating ſuch a ſtory, of which there never had been the ſlighteſt report? Impoſture, in general, keeps within bounds of probability.

But were not all theſe forgeries of ſuch various ſort, and of ſuch widely different natures and characters, ſufficient? Was it thought neceſſary ſtill, the more effectually to delude, and more ſucceſsfully to carry on the impoſition, to produce two curiouſly tinted drawings of players, in the characters and ſtage dreſſes of BASSANIO and SHYLOCK? I leave it to candour and common ſenſe to anſwer theſe queſtions.

But further: It ſeems that all this was not enough. It was not deemed ſufficient, in order to obtain the deſired credit, to produce writings ſo various as to form, matter, and circumſtances; but recourſe muſt be had to the formal proofs of legal inſtruments: and thus the agreements with LOWINE and CONDELLE, and the leaſe to Fraſer

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and his wife, are preſſed into the ſervice, and compelled to lend their ſolemn ſupport to the impoſture.

But what are we to think, and what are we to ſay, of the very extraordinary and important DEED OF TRUST to JOHN HEMYNGE?—Was this addition neceſſary to thoſe already recited? Would impoſture have ventured at ſuch a ſpecific diſtribution of SHAKSPEARE's fortune and effects? Or, if it had, would it have ventured to have laid the ſame pious man, who penned ſo excellent a PROFESSION OF FAITH, under the imputation of incontinence, and nuptial infidelity? cruelly ſubſtantiating ſuch moral dilinquency, by legal proof, which SHAKSPEARE himſelf is made to confirm and authenticate with his own hand and ſeal? There would have been at leaſt an inconſiſtency in thus degrading the ſaint to the ſinner. And to do juſtice even to impoſture itſelf, I do not think it could have had recourſe to ſuch unjuſtifiable means, even in ſupport of its own nefarious deſign. It is but fair, then, to conclude, it never did.

I leave the play of Lear, printed in all reſpects, as to diviſion, length of lines, and orthography,

like the original in the hands of Mr. Ireland, by its own internal evidence to ſpeak for itſelf.

We now ſhall attend to proofs of a different nature. Here are a number of printed books produced; and of ſuch a *ſort*, as might reaſonably be ſuppoſed to belong to our bard. They have almoſt all his ſignature on them: and their margins are filled with ſuch notes and obſervations, as no man could have made but upon an attentive peruſal of them. Now is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that, in the courſe of impoſture, the laborious taſk of peruſing theſe volumes, and filling their margins with notes, would have been deemed neceſſary? But ſuppoſe it had. I then will venture to aſſert, that when all the other vaſt maſs of fabrications are brought into the account, it would have been impoſſible for one man to have executed the buſineſs. But identity of writing, and unity of character, appear throughout the whole. Theſe various writings could only have been produced as the orderly and progreſſive events aroſe which gave them birth: and the ſame progreſſive ſucceſſion, in point of time, is neceſſary to account for theſe being the productions of one and the ſame man.

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The moſt conſummate wiſdom, the moſt perſpicacious ingenuity, united with the moſt artful cunning, and moſt indefatigable labour, could not have anticipated events, and forged ſuch a ſeries, or executed ſuch a work.

But though the life and ingenuity of another were not equal to the taſk, in point of impoſition; that of Shakſpeare's was equal thereto, in the ordinary courſe of human affairs. To believe theſe things therefore to be ſpurious inventions of others, involves us in unſurmountable and unaccountable difficulties. To admit them as legitimate productions of Shakſpeare, involves us in no difficulty whatever.

Perhaps, upon due reflection, the particular evidences ariſing from the books thus circumſtanced, are of more weight than at firſt might be imagined. There can be no doubt that Shakſpeare read much; and ſuch authors to which his peculiar genius would particulaly direct him. Conſidering the veneration in which his memory was held by thoſe who had been happy in his acquaintance when alive, as well as the enthuſiaſm with which every relic has been ſought from his time down to the preſent; is it not ex-

traordinary that few, if any books, or papers, authenticated by his own ſignature, or by the tradition of others, have ever come into the poſſeſſion of the learned? It could not be ſuppoſed theſe books were annihilated by accident, or deſign: the moſt probable circumſtance was, that they were by chance concealed. Their late diſcovery proves this: and thus far agrees with the ordinary courſe of things. In point of evidence this is ſtrong: here is a fact naturally accounted for, that otherwiſe would have been very extraordinary; and their having lain dormant ſo long, and being now found, with the peculiarities of the ſtate in which they appear, are as ſtrong proofs of their authenticity, as far as ſuch proofs go, as can poſſibly be conceived. Here are the books, with ſuch peculiar marks, attributes, notes, and characters, as to aſcertain beyond all doubt to whom they originally belonged. Shakſpeare, by the ſignature of his name, by his curious, ſpecific, and characteriſtic notes, has preſſed this great phalanx of other printed authors into his own ſervice. He is thus ſurrounded with a hoſt of witneſſes: for not only every book, but almoſt every page of

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ſome of them, declare to whom they belonged. I therefore think I ſee this immortal poet riſe again to life, holding theſe ſacred relics in one hand, and hear him ſay, *Theſe were mine:* at the ſame time pointing with the other to theſe important volumes, once his own, informing us, that theſe were his delightful companions in his leiſure hours of retirement, and ſtudy: by converſing with whom he derived pleaſure, profit, and delight: who letting fall their ſparks upon his enkindling mind, lighted up that *muſe of fire*, by which inſpired,

" This Poet's eye in a fine phrenzy rolling,
" Did glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n."

Now as it appears from what has been ſaid, that it was impoſſible for impoſture ever to have attempted, and if it had attempted, ever to have executed, what is here produced; and that from the very nature, variety, and extraordinary characteriſtics of the things themſelves; yet various, extraordinary, and great as they are; none are found inconſiſtent, none contradictory, none incredible. SHAKSPEARE's genius, character, life, and ſituation, connect them all. Multitudinous

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and diverſified as they are; however remote, and apparently divided from, and unconnected with each other; yet, trace them all back to their origin, and you will find them radii of the ſame great circle, all directly tending to, and uniting in one common centre:—that centre is SHAKSPEARE. Let not then any unbeliever, if ſuch there be, after the peruſal of a maſs of ſuch evidence as hath been produced, object credulity to thoſe who have admitted their credibility and given their aſſent. For as in ſome other caſes of infidelity, ſo it is peculiarly in that now before us; thoſe who reject what is propoſed to their belief on the rational evidences adduced in its ſupport, will find themſelves involved in more difficulties, and have more to account for, and more to reconcile, nay more to *believe*, than thoſe, who, on the nature, and ſtability of the evidence, reſt their rational faith. Indeed the evidences of the things in queſtion, are as various and multiform, as the things themſelves; and though they may at firſt view appear diſjointed, and detached from each other; to have no common bond of union to give them ſupport; yet their variety does not ſurpriſe, their minute-

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neſs does not diſtract, their ſeparation does not confound us. They are all brought into unity by the exalted genius and boundleſs imagination of him to whom they relate. They grow out of, belong to, are his appropriates: he gathers all to himſelf. They are ſacred FASCES bound together in indiſſoluble union by the authoritative hand of Shakſpeare himſelf; to which we muſt all, ſooner or later, yield ready aſſent, or reluctant obedience.

I do not believe that a caſe ever exiſted, in which that particular ſort of internal evidence reſulting from *character*, was ſo ſtrong, and ſo convincing, as in the preſent.

In ſome caſes, it is true, an author, as well as other men, might be imitated, both in his manner and ſtyle, as well as in the ſignature of his name. But that is not the caſe in the preſent inſtance. All great and eminent geniuſes have their characteriſtic peculiarities, which not only *diſtinguiſh them* from all *others*, but *make them what they are*. Theſe none can rival, none ſucceſsfully imitate. Of all men and poets, Shakſpeare had the moſt of theſe. He was a particular being, he ſtood alone. To imitate him, ſo as to paſs the deception

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on the world, appears to me next to an impoſſibility. Who could ſoar with his ſublime genius? Who rove with his boundleſs imagination? Who could rival his pregnant wit? Who with intuitive inſpection diſcover the workings of the human mind, and by the natural evolutions of the paſſions intereſt us ſo deeply as this matchleſs poet? Now theſe papers in queſtion bear on them the ſame ſtrong marks of his original genius, as thoſe with which his acknowledged writings are deeply impreſſed. Is it then an unfair inquiry to aſk, if theſe are not Shakſpeare's, to whom do they belong? To whom elſe are they to be aſcribed? Was ever another caſt in his mould? Or can any other be paralleled with him?

This appears to me a proof of ſuch a nature, and ſo peculiarly applicable to the caſe before us, that I hope I ſhall be pardoned for dwelling thereon. For my own part, I muſt confeſs, that, if ſuch evidences of character had appeared unſupported by any other, I ſhould have pronounced upon them at once; and have ſaid, that as there never was but *one* man who could have produced ſuch works, that he; and *he only*, has produced them. The peculiarity, nature, and force of this

proof,

proof, and its fair application to the caſe in queſtion, is of ſuch weight with me, that I am free to declare, that had not Shakſpeare's name appeared upon theſe papers, I ſhould not have heſitated to have aſcribed them to him.

But theſe papers bear not only the ſignature of his hand, but alſo the ſtamp of his ſoul, and the traits of his genius. His *mind* is as manifeſt as his *hand*. The touches of the ſame great maſter every-where appear, and appear to advantage, as they have not been corrected, or chaſtiſed by a bold, or unſkilful hand. Here they are with all their excellencies, and all their imperfections on their head: and by, as well as with theſe, they are to be judged.

Perhaps it may be expected that ſome notice ſhould be taken of the want of fuller information, *from whom, and from whence*, theſe ſacred relics are derived. I ſhould think that what Mr. Ireland has ſo fairly, and liberally, ſaid in his preface reſpecting this matter, ought, at leaſt for the preſent, to ſatisfy the candid Public: more eſpecially when we conſider, that he was laid under thoſe reſtrictions which he there mentions, by the expreſs injunction of the gentleman to whoſe gratuitous bounty he is indebted for theſe precious remains.

But let us argue this matter entirely independent of theſe conſiderations. Certain it is, that if Mr. Ireland, or any other perſon, could have traced, by an unbroken chain of evidence, theſe papers, books, and legal inſtruments, up to the time of Shakſpeare; and ſhown that they did originally belong to him; that, ſo far as the queſtion depended upon this ſort of evidence, it would be immediately decided.

Suppoſe this to have been the caſe, and that ſuch proofs could be adduced? may I be permitted to aſk, if theſe might not have been called in queſtion, if, upon the face of the inſtruments themſelves, and the inſpection and peruſal of their contents, thoſe external and internal marks, characters, and evidences, ſhould have been found wanting, as might naturally have been expected; and which, it is now contended, do really appear? If ſo, and ſurely it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that ſo it would have been; then, after all, we ſhould (as in all ſuch matters muſt be the caſe) be thrown back again upon the external and internal evidences of the documents themſelves; and then, what becomes of the comparatively ſmall, and uninfluential evidence, ariſing from the ſuppoſed ability of tracing theſe reſpective writings up to

the time of Shakſpeare? I confeſs I do not myſelf ſee that this ſort of proof, ſimply conſidered in itſelf, could have been ſo ſatisfactory, and ſo compellent, as to have gained, or forced belief; if, with any plauſible reaſon, the defect of external and internal evidence in the writings themſelves, could have been urged in oppoſition thereto. But at the ſame time it is neceſſary to obſerve, that the like argument will by no means apply to the oppoſite caſe. I mean, that the want of expreſs teſtimony and direct proof of their being traced up to Shakſpeare, does not impair the ſtrength of the external and internal evidences of the authenticity of theſe writings, in the ſame proportion, as the want of this latter evidence would affect that of the former. Which brings us round to the ſame ſtate of the queſtion again; that, after all that can be ſaid, and after all that can be adduced, *it is on the external and internal evidences of the things themſelves we are to form our judgment, and ultimately decide.* This ſeems fully to anſwer, or rather to obviate the queſtion and conſequently the neceſſity of an anſwer), *From whence and from whom theſe papers are derived?* If it be true what is ſtated above, then, from whenceſoever they come, by whomſoever they

are found, let them be attended with whatever other circumſtances can poſſibly be ſuppoſed; *by their own evidence, external and internal, and by theſe* ALONE, *they are to be judged, and their authenticity determined.* It matters not, in this point of view, whether they have lain for ages concealed in a cabinet, or yeſterday dropt from the clouds. Here they are, the ſame as they would have been in themſelves, though they had been known to have been in exiſtence from the time in which Shakſpeare lived. The circumſtance attending their undiſcovered ſtate has nothing to do with the queſtion. It is on their diſcovery, and their inſpection, we are to judge. The ſimple circumſtance of their having lain dormant ſo long, is not of that nature to affect, much leſs to invalidate, their authenticity when diſcovered. The ſame chance (as it is called) which unfortunately concealed them from paſt generations, hath moſt fortunately revealed them to us. Their having remained ſo long undiſcovered, is a circumſtance, which, in the courſe of human affairs, has happened to the moſt eſtimable remains of ancient learning, and the moſt curious works of art. Let not then a thing, the reſult of uncertainty, mutability, and that chance to which all human

affairs

affairs as well as human works are ſubject, be brought in this particular inſtance as an exceptive objection. Indeed there was no great neceſſity of thus enlarging upon this point; becauſe, when the argument of objection is compreſſed into its own narrow dimenſions, the bare ſtatement of it will be ſufficient to ſhow its futility. And it is this: *Theſe things not being found before, is an argument againſt their authenticity now they are diſcovered.* But their authenticity is, *toto cælo,* diſtinct from their diſcovery, and the times, and circumſtances in which they were found. Their authenticity, as before obſerved, is to be judged of, and determined by the external and internal evidences of the things themſelves, whenever they appear: And behold! *here they are.*

But to give the argument full play: let us ſuppoſe all that can be urged; and, for a moment, admit, that, being able to trace up the ſeveral writings in queſtion, to the time of Shakſpeare himſelf, would have been a conſiderable argument in their favour; and a collateral ſupport of the external and internal evidences. May we not ſay, that if, upon an impartial inquiry, theſe evidences are ſuch, as fully to ſatisfy the mind, and gain its aſſent, that then ſuch evi-

dences

dences muſt, by the ſtate of the argument, be allowed to have great and important weight; ſeeing they can ſupport the cauſe unſupported themſelves. If this be the caſe, then it will follow, that they need not the collateral aſſiſtance of any other proofs. In the preſent inſtance, when this particular proof demanded by the queſtion, *From whence did they come, and from whom are they derived?* is wanting; and that want not only ſo candidly acknowledged, but rationally accounted for, by the very circumſtances themſelves by which they came into the hands of the preſent poſſeſſor; can the urgent and continued demand for ſuch proof, be aſcribed to aught elſe, but unreaſonable expectation, unjuſtifiable caprice, or boundleſs curioſity?

If then, as muſt evidently be the caſe from the nature of the writings in queſtion, we can only form a proper judgment, and decide upon their authenticity, from their external and internal evidence; and ſuch evidence can alone be obtained by a nice and narrow inſpection, and a careful and accurate peruſal of theſe papers; how unfair and unjuſt, how unreaſonable, nay preſumptuous, would it be for any man, though gifted with conſummate wiſdom, though poſ-

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ſeſſed of the moſt exalted underſtanding, cleareſt intellect, and moſt penetrating ſagacity, to paſs a deciſive ſentence upon ſuch writings; and that too *againſt* their AUTHENTICITY, *having never inſpected, having never examined them?*

I doubt not, but if this, which I have put in the form of a queſtion, had appeared in the form of an aſſertion, it would have ſtartled the mind, and wounded the feelings of every unprejudiced reader: ſince I do not believe a man is to be found of the moſt ordinary underſtanding, who has the uſe of his moral powers, and can diſtinguiſh right from wrong, who would heſitate one moment in deciding the queſtion. Sorry am I to be under the neceſſity of ſtating this matter even in a queſtionable form. And were it not from fear of leaving unfavourable impreſſions on the minds of my readers, and fixing a ſtigma of reproach (which I would by all means, if poſſible, ever avoid) upon the refinement, candour, and liberality of the preſent age; I would (compelled thereto by what I *know*) have ſtated it in the downright way of *unqualified aſſertion*. I know what I hazard by the declaration; but juſtice forces me, however reluctant, to make it: and I moſt ſincerely lament the neceſſity. But I turn

bluſhing

bluſhing from the thought; and ſhall only ſay, that, next to the unmanly, unjuſt, and nefarious attempt of palming forgeries, of any ſort, upon the world; is that of imputing to others the ſame bold, audacious, and wicked deſign.

I have only to add, that theſe papers, books, and inſtruments, in the poſſeſſion of Mr. Ireland, are open to the inſpection and peruſal of every candid, fair, and impartial inquirer. The learned are earneſtly ſolicited, and not only invited, but urged, to the inquiry into their authenticity. It is no leſs Mr. Ireland's wiſh, than his intereſt in every reſpect, that this ſhould be done. Being fully perſuaded himſelf, and ſupported in this perſuaſion by the joint teſtimony of a number of learned and inquiſitive men, of the firſt abilities in their reſpective profeſſions, of the undoubted authenticity of theſe writings; he took the moſt effectual means, as he thought, to make it generally known, that he had ſuch treaſures in his hands, before he ventured to publiſh them. And it was not before he had conſulted ſome of the moſt eminent in their different profeſſions, and men of diſtinguiſhed characters and abilities; and having received not only unqualified declarations of their full conviction, but alſo the moſt

liberal

liberal promiſes of ſupport; that he ventured to announce to the world that he was in poſſeſſion of theſe precious remains. As to the full conviction of ſome of theſe ſeveral gentlemen, who in their profeſſion, character, and ability, rank high in the literary world, I can ſpeak of my own certain knowledge. And I beg leave to mention one particular inſtance, among many others, of a learned dignified Divine, whom, with two others, I introduced myſelf to peruſe theſe papers; who ſignified his approbation and conviction in the following ſtrong expreſſion: "Dr. "Farmer has proved, as nearly to mathematical "demonſtration as the nature of the thing will "allow, that Shakſpeare was not poſſeſſed of claſ-"ſical learning. The papers we have inſpected "this day come as near to the ſame ſort of proof, "reſpecting their authenticity, as the nature of "ſuch evidence can admit." In which declaration he was ſupported by the ready aſſent of two other reverend and learned gentlemen, by whom we were accompanied.

I have thus freely, and without reſerve, offered theſe obſervations to the candid conſideration of the Public, with all imaginable deference and reſpect; not over-ſolicitous what reception they

may meet with, or over-anxious with what conviction they may immediately be attended. I wiſh not, by overſtraining my argument, to put a wrong bias on any one's mind; or intereſt them any further than I wiſh them to be influenced by TRUTH. And above all, I moſt ardently wiſh, that what I have ſuggeſted, may be the means of exciting a deſire of inſpecting the papers themſelves; being fully perſuaded, that this will prove not only the beſt means of judging on their authenticity, but alſo of eſtabliſhing their claims to credibility.

I think theſe papers ſtand on a firm foundation; and that, ſtanding on them, the weakeſt defender is ſtrong. It is this ſtation, fortified by truth, that gives me boldneſs. And as I think it tenable againſt a hoſt of oppoſing aſſailants, however numerous, however commiſſioned, becauſe it is too ſtrong to be ſapped, and too elevated to be taken by ſtorm, I reſt in perfect ſecurity, humbly offering this piece of advice to any who may have the hardihood to make an attack—to beware, leſt their own weapons recoil, and wound themſelves.

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